



**Transit Advisory Committee**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2026**  
 March 18<sup>th</sup>, 10:00am  
 Albert Lea; Zoom

Our mission is to provide safe, reliable, accessible and courteous public transportation services in response to the needs of our communities.

Committee Members:

- |   |                                   |   |   |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| x | Kirk Kuchera – SMART              |   | Larry Baker – Albert Lea City Council         |
| x | Joanne Brackey – SMART            |   | Paul Fischer – Austin City Council            |
| v | Garry Hart – CVS/SMART            |   | Dan Sparks – Mower County                     |
| x | Chris Thompson – SMART            | v | Sue Loch – Mayo Health Systems                |
| v | Don White – SMART                 |   | Bonnie Buchanan – Jefferson Lines             |
| x | Ashley Strand – SMART             |   | Waseca County – Commissioner                  |
|   | <del>Derek Anderson – SMART</del> |   | <del>Kelly Sutlief – Waseca (passenger)</del> |
| x | Greg Krueger – Steele County      | x | Jim Wolter – MNDOT OTAT                       |
|   | Troy Klecker – City of Owatonna   |   |   |

x – in person; v – virtual

**Review of scope and mission for TAC**

Purpose: The purpose of a TAC is to provide guidance and advise transit staff in issues related to transit services, funding, marketing, service strategies, developing policy, special projects, and capital investments/projects. This committee/council is not a governing board, so do not have a legal authority to oversee the transit program, however, provide as a valuable resource to the transit program in developing and providing for transit services.

- Updates
  - Stats

**SMART Transit-Cedar Valley Services - 2025 Data**

Data for all counties combined	no preschool												YTD
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	
<b>PASSENGERS</b>													
Albert Lea	5,642	5,324	5,346	6,301	5,563	3,386	4,272	4,156	6,019	6,426	4,926	5,181	62,542
Austin	11,056	10,525	9,087	11,901	11,385	5,188	4,865	5,815	11,704	12,469	9,924	9,660	113,579
Owatonna	3,480	3,280	3,166	3,538	3,413	2,209	2,139	1,992	3,427	4,044	3,097	3,172	36,957
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	2,025	1,641	1,428	1,542	1,413	1,365	1,019	978	1,703	1,805	1,557	1,553	18,029
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,203</b>	<b>20,770</b>	<b>19,027</b>	<b>23,282</b>	<b>21,774</b>	<b>12,148</b>	<b>12,295</b>	<b>12,941</b>	<b>22,853</b>	<b>24,744</b>	<b>19,504</b>	<b>19,566</b>	<b>231,107</b>
<b>HOURS</b>													
Albert Lea	1,303	1,216	1,165	1,279	1,269	1,077	1,201	1,130	1,289	1,392	1,105	1,236	14,658
Austin	2,090	1,973	1,936	2,085	2,099	1,722	1,835	1,836	2,078	2,228	1,775	1,964	23,618
Owatonna	1,272	1,162	1,168	1,175	1,249	1,057	1,081	1,003	1,039	1,357	1,072	1,237	13,869
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	679	658	660	625	676	686	702	690	682	702	704	758	8,221
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,344</b>	<b>5,008</b>	<b>4,928</b>	<b>5,162</b>	<b>5,292</b>	<b>4,542</b>	<b>4,819</b>	<b>4,658</b>	<b>5,087</b>	<b>5,678</b>	<b>4,656</b>	<b>5,194</b>	<b>60,366</b>
<b>MILES</b>													
Albert Lea	14,696	13,498	13,359	14,602	13,698	11,899	13,139	12,773	14,959	16,153	13,087	13,754	165,617
Austin	22,327	19,992	19,965	20,862	20,813	19,085	19,569	19,498	21,386	23,705	18,207	19,122	244,531
Owatonna	13,609	12,105	12,103	12,255	12,863	11,085	11,556	10,694	12,271	13,684	10,737	11,687	144,649
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>													0
Waseca	4,939	4,621	4,269	4,756	4,387	4,773	3,729	3,937	5,247	5,630	4,243	4,752	55,283
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55,571</b>	<b>50,216</b>	<b>49,696</b>	<b>52,475</b>	<b>51,761</b>	<b>46,842</b>	<b>47,993</b>	<b>46,902</b>	<b>53,863</b>	<b>59,172</b>	<b>46,274</b>	<b>49,315</b>	<b>610,080</b>

- 2025 was just shy of 2023 for most trips since COVID

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
62,542	60,686	60,987	54,832	47,103	35,764	66,630	72,627	63,793	52,900	49,612	41,645
113,579	105,940	105,783	103,093	94,758	82,167	122,684	123,489	104,812	98,681	90,045	80,631
36,957	40,897	46,249	41,730	43,599	38,293	55,238	58,205	57,617	50,340	44,445	38,979
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,890	2,935	2,596	
18,029	15,125	18,305	20,502	18,944	14,710	24,246	23,417	21,035	18,519		
231,107	222,648	231,324	220,157	204,404	170,934	268,798	277,738	249,147	223,375	186,698	161,255
14,658	14,772	14,307	13,920	14,059	12,050	14,645	14,824	13,206	10,701	8,166	7,501
23,618	23,792	23,232	22,802	24,256	22,032	23,826	22,595	20,771	19,654	18,749	19,061
13,869	14,030	13,610	12,883	14,563	13,184	15,882	14,387	12,895	10,655	9,908	10,050
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	718	514	507	
8,221	6,831	7,170	8,867	8,523	7,420	9,436	9,409	9,744	8,112		
60,366	59,424	58,319	58,470	61,400	54,685	63,788	61,215	57,334	49,636	37,330	36,612
165,617	170,824	176,471	178,410	177,958	140,273	181,264	183,952	168,274	133370.0	114,940	111,127
244,531	246,675	260,480	249,321	264,296	245,547	286,710	239,193	227,469	229089.7	223,447	217,466
144,649	154,203	170,565	157,747	175,158	151,328	210,922	193,709	178,377	151102.1	150,747	150,065
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,431	1444.0	1,037	
55,283	46,894	55,420	63,711	62,249	47,366	73,630	70,488	60,808	45875.0		
610,080	618,596	662,936	649,189	679,661	584,514	752,525	687,342	636,359	560,881	490,171	478,658

- With increase in hours late 2025, there should be an increase in trips for 2026

### SMART Transit-Cedar Valley Services - 2026

Data for all counties combined			
	January	February	
<b>PASSENGERS</b>			
Albert Lea	5,416	6,678	
Austin	11,421	11,333	
Owatonna	3,270	3,908	
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>			
Waseca	1,860	2,270	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,967</b>	<b>24,189</b>	
<b>HOURS</b>			
Albert Lea	1,280	1,243	
Austin	2,179	2,087	
Owatonna	1,245	1,209	
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>			
Waseca	812	772	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,515</b>	<b>5,310</b>	
<b>MILES</b>			
Albert Lea	14,522	14,174	
Austin	21,453	19,461	
Owatonna	12,632	12,407	
<b>Blooming Prairie</b>			
Waseca	6,054	5,237	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54,661</b>	<b>51,279</b>	

- Good start to the year – February has third highest ridership in history; highest since 2020

- What's New

- National Transit Employee Appreciation Day

- Huge thank you to each and every transit worker at SMART, in Minnesota, and throughout the country – their commitment to their work is essential to our communities, and to the people that rely on public transportation to get to their medical appointments, jobs, educational opportunities, and much more.
    - Wrapping up a busy few months of meeting with city and county governments – last meeting is next week as we meet the Steele County Commissioners
      - Been great to connect with our public officials to highlight the great work SMART is doing and the upcoming projects we have planned
    - Gearing up for a busy year of projects with MNDOT (more info below)
  - SMART Functional Updates
    - Training / D&A
      - Lot of training taking place this year – five new hires since January (four currently)
        - Have one taking CDL test tomorrow, two more working on CDL training
        - Three of the four cities have seen new drivers this year
      - Been working through spring training with staff this last month (updates, etc.)
      - Been working on CPR training with staff and will continue to offer this as needed
      - Drug & Alcohol has been going well
        - Three year audit with MNDOT is officially wrapped up – good for another three years
        - Been dealing with some challenges with testing locations (TriMa in Owatonna closed)
    - Owatonna/Waseca
      - Owatonna
        - Working with new hire currently (PT) – once he is trained in Owatonna will be in a great place
        - Looking forward to meeting with County Commissioners next week
        - Setting up meetings with senior living providers to discuss SMART and the services we offer
          - This can help promote our services to seniors who often need assistance with transportation
      - Waseca
        - Things have been going well
        - Continue to provide shuttle service between Albert Lea and Waseca
    - Austin/Dispatch
      - Austin
        - Staffing is going very well – fully staffed and staff are doing great
        - Been active in connecting with the community
          - Met with government officials as well as various nursing homes
        - All hours of service are up and running – increased service and riders across various routes
      - Dispatch
        - Have a staff who is currently out on leave – hopefully return soon
    - Albert Lea
      - Government meetings have been going well
      - Also visiting local nursing homes and answering questions about the services SMART provides
      - Have a new Lead Driver in Albert Lea and he has been doing well
      - Staffing is going well
  - MNDOT Update
    - Operating
      - MNDOT moving to ‘Formula Grant’ for 2027
        - Application will open in May and be submitted in June
    - Capital
      - Vehicles
        - Vehicle Replacement

- 2024 Vehicle Replacement
  - Received third bus mid-February – All buses have been received
- 2025 Vehicle Replacement
  - Bus has been ordered – should receive later this summer (July/Aug)
- 2026 Vehicle Replacement
  - Applied for seven buses
  - Initial notice indicated six buses approved
  - Hopefully order these spring 2026
- 2027 Vehicle Replacement
  - Updating process next year to shorten time between ordering and receiving bus
- Vehicle Disposition
  - Disposing of older buses as new ones arrive
- Low-No Emission Grant – BETTER
  - SMART has signed the contract – awaiting Altoona Testing on a new MicroBird model (new to the U.S.; has been used in Canada)
    - Ordering could take place later this year
  - Project also includes infrastructure and training for staff (and maintenance contractor among others)
- Facilities
  - Austin and Waseca facility approved through FTA grant (partnership with MNDOT)
    - Working through final touches of NEPA work for Waseca
    - Making adjustments with location in Austin
- Other
  - Submitted 2025 Technology Grant application for new routing software
    - Received notification from MNDOT this week – contract and procurement to follow
  - Submitted 2026 Large Capital Grant Application for staff support vehicle
    - Received notification last month – contract and procurement to follow
  - Submitted Large Capital Grant Application for replacement staff support vehicle in the future – was submitted 9/30/25
  - Will be applying for Large Capital Grant in 2027 for replacement of Austin Support Veh.
- Big Picture – Down the Road
  - Facility projects
    - Work with MNDOT / FTA on Austin & Waseca facility projects
  - Cedar Valley Services Update
    - Congrats to Kirk for new position as Transit Director
    - Lot of behind the scenes work at Cedar Valley Services
      - Working on updating technology – both hardware and software
    - Seeing an increase in auditing as a whole – working through these changes with the state
    - Working on some rate-restructuring with the state
    - Excited to work on the SMART projects coming up this year – facilities, vehicles, etc.

#### 2026 Program Goals – Ideas?

- Continue to streamline and simplify process and policies
- Continue to keep services up and running through staffing retention / filling open positions as needed
- Work with MNODT / FTA on facility projects

#### TAC Members/Community Feedback from Last Meeting to Re-visit:

- N/A

## **NEW items from TAC Members/Community Feedback?**

- [Can look at new medical facilities in Albert Lea and Owatonna as possible drug and alcohol testing sites](#)

### **2026 Meeting Dates:**

Quarterly on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 10:00 am, rotating city each quarter (Zoom option available for all meetings)

Q1 = March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026 ... 905 E 16<sup>th</sup> St, Albert Lea, MN (In Person/Zoom)

Q2 = June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026 ... 2803 W Oakland Ave, Austin, MN (In Person/Zoom)

Q3 = September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026 ... 140 32<sup>nd</sup> Ave. NW, Owatonna, MN (In Person/Zoom)

\*Q4 = December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026 ... 303 South State Street, Waseca, MN 56093 (In Person/Zoom)

\* Held at Emergency Services Building – Waseca Community Room

\*\* *All dates and in-person opportunities for all meetings subject to change*

**Thank you all so much for your continued support and advocacy on behalf of public transportation in our region!**